DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 303 738 CG 021 437

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TITLE The Interrelations of Negative Affectivity, Anxiety Sensitivity, and Fearfulness.
PUB DATE Aug 88
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (96th, Atlanta, GA, August 12-16, 1988).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Anxiety; *Beliefs; College Students; *Fear; Higher Education; *Negative Attitudes; Predictor Variables

ABSTRACT

Anxiety sensitivity (AS) is an individual difference variable consisting of beliefs that anxiety experiences lead to negative consequences, such as illness, embarrassment, or additional anxiety. Negative Affectivity (NA) is an individual difference variable that reflects a tendency to experience negative affect and to maintain a negative view of oneself and of the world. This study was designed to test the hypothesis that the association between AS and fearfulness would be reduced substantially by controlling NA. The Anxiety Sensitivity Index, the Fear Survey Schedule II, and the Negative Affectivity Scale were completed by 100 introductory psychology students. The results did not support the hypothesis. Although AS and NA were correlated, AS was a strong predictor of fearfulness, even after variance in fearfulness accounted for by NA had been removed. Conversely, the relation of NA to fearfulness was greatly attenuated by partialling out variance attributable to AS. These findings suggest that a person's beliefs about the aversiveness of being anxious are important in assessing predisposition to fear. Four references and three tables are included. (Author/NB)

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THE INTERRELATIONS OF NEGATIVE AFFECTIVITY, ANXIETY SENSITIVITY, AND FEARFULNESS

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The Interrelations of Negative

Affectivity, Anxiety Sensitivity, and Fearfulness

Abstract

This study was designed to test the hypothesis that the association between Anxiety Sensitivity (AS: the belief that anxiety experiences lead to negative consequences) and fearfulness would be reduced substantially by controlling for Negative Affectivity (NA: a tendency to experience negative affect and to maintain a negative view of oneself and of the world). The results did not support the hypothesis. Although AS and NA were correlated, AS was a strong predictor of fearfulness, even after variance in fearfulness accounted for by NA had been removed. Conversely, the relation of NA to fearfulness was greatly attenuated by partialling out variance attributable to AS. The results suggest that a person's beliefs about the aversiveness of being anxious are important in assessing predisposition to fear.

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The Interrelations of Negative Affectivity, Anxiety Sensitivity, and Fearfulness

Anxiety sensitivity (AS) is an individual difference variable consisting of beliefs that anxiety experiences lead to negative consequences, like illness, embarrassment, or additional anxiety (Reiss, Peterson, Gursky, & McNally, 1986). Reiss et al. showed that AS was associated with anxiety disorders, especially with agoraphobia, and that AS explained variance in reported fears, as measured by the Fear Survey Schedule-II (Geer, 1965), that was not explained by measures of anxiety.

Negative Affectivity (NA) is an individual difference variable that reflects a tendency to experience negative affect and to maintain a negative view of oneself and of the world. Watson and Clark (1984) argued the NA is a broad personal disposition that subsumes trait anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. One could argue that AS is a reflection of NA, and that the association between AS and fears is a function of the fact that both AS and fears are correlated with NA. If NA and AS are related, and if NA and fears are related, then the ability of AS to predict fears might simply reflect the fact that both variables are associated with NA.

This study was designed to test the hypothesis that the association between AS and fears would be reduced substantially by controlling for NA. If AS is predictive of fearfulness only because both variables correlate with NA, then AS should not account for variance in fearfulness beyond that accounted for by NA.

Method

Subjects

Data were collected from 100 introductory psychology students whose participation partially fulfilled a course requirement. Thirty seven subjects were males; 46 were females. Because of an administrative error by the experimenter in one of the groups of subjects, we had no information about the sex of 17 subjects.

Instruments

The Anxiety Sensitivity Index (ASI; Reiss et al., 1986) is a 16-item scale that measures beliefs about the aversiveness of feeling or appearing anxious. Possible scores range from zero to 80. Reiss et al. (1986) report evidence for the reliability and validity of the ASI.

The Fear Survey Schedule II (FSS-II; Geer, 1965) asks for self ratings of fearfulness (from 1 = none to 5 = terror) to 51 specific stimuli and events.

The Negative Affectivity Scale (NAS; Levin & Stokes, 1987) uses 21 items to measure the extent to which a person tends to experience negative affect and to hold a negative view of the self and the world. Levin and Stokes have demonstrated that the NAS has good internal consistency (alpha=.87), test-retest reliability (6 weeks r =.87), and construct validity, including convergent validity with measures of anxiety, neuroticism, and self-esteem.

Procedure

Subjects completed the three questionnaires in groups of about 15. An approximately equal member of subjects received each of three possible orders of the three questionnaires.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for the three instruments for the whole sample and separately for males and females. Females were significantly more fearful than males. The correlations among the variables, shown in Table 2, indicate that each of the three variables is positively related to each other variable. Comparing the correlations for males and females reveals that the ASI-NAS correlation is significant only for females, and is significantly greater for females than males ($z=2.00$, $p < .05$).

Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

NAS and ASI together accounted for about 38% of the variance in FSS-II scores ($F = 29.33$, $df = 2,97$, $p < .001$). Adding ASI scores to the prediction equation after NAS scores are included increased the R^2 by 22% ($F = 33.47$, $df = 1,97$, $p < .001$). Reversing the order of the entry of the variables and adding NAS after ASI scores increased R^2 by only 3% ($F = 4.41$, $df = 1,97$, $p < .05$). When these analyses are performed separately for males and females, the percentage of variance accounted for by the two predictors together is 34 for males and 47 for females. Among males, ASI independently accounted for 21% of the variance in FSS-II; for females the figure was 29%. For males the independent contribution of NAS was 8%; for females NAS did not make a significant independent contribution to predicting FSS-II scores. These results are summarized in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

Although measures of AS and NA were correlated in these data, the results argue against the idea that AS is related to fearfulness only through its association with NA. In fact, the AS-NA correlation was significant only for females. A person's beliefs about the aversiveness of being anxious seem to be important in assessing predisposition to fear. The specific measure of anxiety sensitivity seems to be more important in predicting fearfulness than is an indicator of global negative affect. Reiss et al. (1986) found similar results when they compared AS and measures of anxiety as predictors of fearfulness. It is noteworthy that AS is related to reported fearfulness even after measures of general levels of anxiety or characterological NA are partialed out. These results suggest that high AS -- the belief that anxiety has terrible, negative effects -- may be a predisposing factor to anxiety disorders.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Variables

		All Subjects (N=100)	Males (N=37)	Females (N=46)
NAS	Mean	71.81	70.00	72.5
	SD	15.46	13.60	17.3
ASI	Mean	17.75	16.5	16.5
	SD	9.30	7.4	9.5
FSS-II	Mean	162.64	142.9	169.7*
	SD	42.73	38.8	44.3

* t=2.89, p<.005, for difference between males and females

Table 2

Intercorrelations Among Variables

	All Subjects (N=100)	Males (N=37)	Females (N=46)
FSS-I & ASI	.59***	.51**	.68***
FSS-II & NAS	.40***	.36*	.42**
ASI & NAS	.42***	.17	.56***

*p<.05
**p<.01
***p<.001

Table 3

Predictors of FSS-II by Sex

	Overall R^2	R^2 Females	R^2 Males
NAS & ASI Together	.38**	.47***	.34**
ASI only	.35**	.46**	.26*
NAS only	.16**	.18*	.13*
Incremental Increase for ASI	.22**	.29**	.21*
Incremental Increase for NAS	.03*	.01	.08*

* $p<.05$
** $p<.001$